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PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHLP #1420/01 1762224
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 242224Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7831
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 8096
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 5442
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 9386
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 6605
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3706
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3983
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5569
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 6330
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 1051
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0021
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 1228
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LA PAZ 001420

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/21/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: AFTER OWN MISTAKES; PODEMOS BLAMING US

Classified By: EcoPol Chief Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: We are seeing increased signs of frustration with the United States from senior PODEMOS Party opposition contacts as the August 10 recall referendum for President Evo Morales and department prefects (state governors) approaches.

Former President Jorge "Tuto" Quiroga, the head of Bolivian's largest opposition party blasted perceived U.S. indifference to Bolivia to the AmCham Board of Directors. Others from PODEMOS have voiced similar concerns to us as if they were speaking from talking points. PODEMOS has been in disarray since the decision to go forward with the MAS-proposed recall August 10 referenda, which served to breath new life into President Morales' cause at a time when the regional autonomy movements had momentum. End summary.

Quiroga: U.S. Doesn't Care About Us

[¶2.](#) (C) During the question and answer session of a June 17 presentation to the American Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Jorge Quiroga, head of the largest opposition party, PODEMOS, blasted the United States. Quiroga said he's given up on the U.S. and that "they're not doing anything to help us. They only care about the petroleum of Venezuela, the narcotrafficking in Colombia, and the immigrants of Mexico."

PODEMOS Echo Chamber

[¶3.](#) (C) Senator Roger Pinto (PODEMOS, Pando) and Javier Flores (opposition organizer) told PolOffs June 18 that they are also frustrated with the U.S. Flores repeated Quiroga's AmCham points verbatim and said this was the general consensus of an all-night opposition strategy meeting June [¶16.](#)

Pinto Dares the Government (and us) to Break Relations

[¶4.](#) (C) Pinto explained that his June 17 public statements daring the government to break relations with the United States were intended to "strip the government naked." Pinto said he was calling the government's bluff on all their anti-U.S. rhetoric, and calling on us to do the same. "Just stand up and say, 'fine you don't want us here, we'll

leave.'" Pinto ruled out emphasizing the positive U.S. programs and development investment in Bolivia as an alternative to overtly provoking the government. "Where has that gotten anyone? Even educated people who comprehend this don't really understand it is at risk until you take it away." He added that the government had no intention of breaking relations, thus there is no down side to daring them to leave. "What was there reaction? Blank faces. They had no answer because they can't break relations. This would be the end for them."

15. (C) When asked what would happen if he was wrong and the government follows through on his dare to break U.S. relations, Pinto bluntly said, "Then you should leave." Pinto argued that cutting the U.S. Mission to a minimum and cutting U.S. assistance programs would expose the government's disregard for its people and rob the government of using the United States as foil and an excuse for poor domestic stewardship. He said the government might try to blame the United States for leaving/cutting back, but "after three days with an empty stomach, people will turn their anger on the government, where it belongs."

Mixing Insults with Pleas for Help

16. (C) Both Pinto and Flores poured on a full assault on the United States for "not doing anything to help us." Flores said the opposition is "proud that we did everything on our own, without any help from any outside source." He initially

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agreed that this will help the opposition weather government accusations of conspiring with foreign agents, but later piled on with Pinto, who argued that "they are accusing you anyway. They are accusing us anyway. It does not matter to them what the reality is." Pinto accused us of sitting back and letting the government "destroy democracy and destroy the economy."

17. (C) Pinto argued all Western government are "already taking sides" by de facto "collaborating" with the government through bilateral programs and therefore "giving them oxygen." Both Pinto and Flores argued that it was "insane" for the U.S. and other Western countries to "continue to not do anything" to help the opposition in Bolivia. Flores said he understood why we could not support them overtly and didn't expect this to change, but asked that we support them indirectly with statements and by sharing information.

18. (C) Flores said he "knows" we have information linking the government to the FARC, Chavez, and other extreme groups that, if released, would "ruin August 10 for Evo," referring to the planned recall referendum on presidential and prefectural (state governor) mandates. Flores said that Quiroga will travel to Colombia to convince President Alvaro Uribe to release evidence of FARC connections to high-ranking officials in Bolivia, Brazil, and Paraguay. Pinto said PODEMOS is focusing on attacking the "independence" of the government and their nationalistic rhetoric by emphasizing Evo's subservience to foreign groups.

August 10 Full Court Press

19. (C) Pinto said the August 10 recall referendum on the mandate of President Evo Morales and departmental prefects (state governors) was a critical turning point and it was now or never if we are "going to do anything to save democracy in Bolivia." Pinto argued that the Bolivian people needed to be steered in the "right" direction and "advertising costs money... It's all about money." Flores made the point that the government has an "800 pound gorilla" in its corner in Venezuela and "we are alone." Pinto said it was time to "see who is wearing the pants" and that we should at a minimum publicly counter the government every time they attack

democratic institutions or make unfounded accusations.

August 10: We've got them right where they want us"

¶10. (C) Flores said with the exception of Carlos Mesa and the National Unity Party, "everyone" in the opposition decided to move forward the recall referendum at the June 16 meeting. He said the opposition will not entertain government attempts to negotiate "out of a situation they are afraid of losing." Flores said the government is looking for a way out of the opposition trap and, even if President Evo Morales survives the recall, the opposition will at least have postponed the constitutional referendum until 2009. (Note: Bolivian law only stipulates one national referendum per year. End Note.)

Comment:

¶11. (C) A year ago PODEMOS was imploring us to help them stop Evo Morales' project of change. "Speak out, take tough measures," opposition figures would urge. But, when the regional opposition in the Media Luna effectively gelled with its autonomy movement and rose as a force against Evo, we could do no wrong in PODEMOS eyes. "Stay quiet, let the government struggle, do not give them an external distraction," they would tell us. Now, after a poor strategic decision to push forward with a recall referendum, a decision that has split the national opposition from the regional opposition and given Evo an opportunity to claim that he still has a mandate from the people if he does well in the August 10 recall, PODEMOS is blaming us for not doing

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the necessary to stop Evo. Clearly, PODEMOS is in disarray. Some up and coming opposition politicians believe that Tuto Quiroga must go as he represents the past and is not a viable alternative to Morales, no one seems willing to encourage him to leave the scene.

¶12. (C) Senate President Oscar Ortiz (PODEMOS) and Senator Pinto have requested a meeting with the Charge'. We understand Tuto Quiroga is also planning to request a meeting. Flores has told us the purpose is to better coordinate with us and clear up any "misunderstandings" about a "continued friendship with the U.S." We suspect they will attempt to make nice following last week's harsh words. End

Comment

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